

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A method of providing object-based content to be reported in an external general reporting application, the method comprising:

receiving a user selection of a business object having associated attributes, and displaying a view of the attributes associated with the selected business object;

receiving a user selection of at least one of the attributes, the selected at least one attribute to be displayed in a report generated in the external reporting application, and adding the selected at least one attribute to a business content structure of selected attributes;

retrieving data associated with the business content structure; and

generating an output file that the external reporting application can use to generate the report, the report to include the business content structure and the data associated therewith.

2. The method of claim 1 wherein a business content design wizard assists in defining the business content structure.

3. The method of claim 1 wherein the business content structure represents meta-data information.

4. The method of claim 1 further comprising displaying a view of a plurality of business content structures and receiving a user selection of one of the business content structures to be included in a report.

5. The method of claim 1 further comprising displaying a view of a plurality of business objects each having associated attributes, and wherein each of the business objects has a defined relationship to the selected business object.

6. The method of claim 5 further comprising displaying a view of the attributes for the plurality of related business objects.

7. The method of claim 6 further comprising receiving a user selection of at least one of the attributes for the plurality of related business objects, the selected at least one attribute to be displayed in a report generated in the external reporting application, and adding the selected at

least one attribute to the business content structure of selected attributes.

8. The method of claim 7 wherein the business content structure represents meta-data information.

9. The method of claim 1 further comprising defining a calculated field to be included in the business content structure, wherein the calculated field is associated with a function that takes one or more business object attributes as input, and uses a formula to compute a resultant value for the calculated field based on the input.

10. The method of claim 9 wherein the business content structure represents meta-data information.

11. The method of claim 9 wherein the resultant value is included in the output file.

12. The method of claim 1 further comprising persistently storing the business content structure in a database.

13. The method of claim 12 wherein the business content structure is stored as an XML document in the database, and wherein the business content structure attributes correspond to tags in the XML document.

14. The method of claim 1 wherein retrieving the data associated with the business content structure comprises constructing and filing at least one database query.

15. The method of claim 14 wherein the database query is an SQL query that uses the concept of derived tables.

16. The method of claim 1 wherein the output file is an ActiveX Data Object Recordset.

17. The method of claim 1 wherein generating the output file that the external reporting application can use to generate the report further comprises transferring the output file to a reporting-tool-specific interface component capable of plug-and-play interaction with the external reporting application.

18. A method of providing object-based content to be reported in an external general reporting application, the method comprising:

receiving a user selection of a business object having associated attributes, and displaying a view of the attributes associated with the selected business object;

receiving a user selection of at least one of the attributes, the selected at least one attribute to be displayed in a report generated in the external reporting application, and adding the selected at least one attribute to a business content structure of selected attributes; and

persistently storing the business content structure in a database so that it can later be retrieved and used to generate an output file that the external reporting application can use to generate the report with current data.

19. Computer-readable medium with program instructions stored thereon that when executed perform the following functions for providing object-based content to be reported in an external general reporting application:

receives a user selection of a business object having associated attributes, and displays a view of the attributes associated with the selected business object;

receives a user selection of at least one of the attributes, the selected at least one attribute to be displayed in a report generated in the external reporting application, and adds the selected at least one attribute to a business content structure of selected attributes;

retrieves data associated with the business content structure; and

generates an output file that the external reporting application can use to generate the report, the report to include the business content structure and the data associated therewith.

20. The medium of claim 19 wherein a business content design wizard assists in defining the business content structure.

21. The medium of claim 19 wherein the business content structure represents meta-data information.

22. The medium of claim 19 further comprising instructions that when executed displays a view of a plurality of business content structures and receives a user selection of one of the business content structures to be included in a report.

23. The medium of claim 19 further comprising instructions that when executed displays a view of a plurality of business objects each having associated attributes, and wherein each of the business objects has a defined relationship to the selected business object.

24. The medium of claim 23 further comprising instructions that when executed displays a view of the attributes for the plurality of related business objects.

25. The medium of claim 24 further comprising instructions that when executed receives a user selection of at least one of the attributes for the plurality of related business objects, the selected at least one attribute to be displayed in a report generated in the external reporting application, and adds the selected at least one attribute to the business content structure of selected attributes.

26. The medium of claim 25 wherein the business content structure represents meta-data information.

27. The medium of claim 19 further comprising instructions that when executed defines a calculated field to

be included in the business content structure, wherein the calculated field is associated with a function that takes one or more business object attributes as input, and uses a formula to compute a resultant value for the calculated field based on the input.

28. The medium of claim 27 wherein the business content structure represents meta-data information.

29. The medium of claim 27 wherein the resultant value is included in the output file.

30. The medium of claim 19 further comprising instructions that when executed persistently stores the business content structure in a database.

31. The medium of claim 30 wherein the business content structure is stored as an XML document in the database, and wherein the business content structure attributes correspond to tags in the XML document.

32. The medium of claim 19 wherein retrieving the data associated with the business content structure comprises constructing and filing at least one database query.

33. The medium of claim 32 wherein the database query is an SQL query that uses the concept of derived tables.

34. The medium of claim 19 wherein the output file is an ActiveX Data Object Recordset.

35. The medium of claim 19 wherein generating the output file that the external reporting application can use to generate the report further comprises transferring the output file to a reporting-tool-specific interface component capable of plug-and-play interaction with the external reporting application.